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ABSTRACT

This handbook for child care centers that are expanding their support to parents of children in their programs begins by describing the Parent Services Project (PSP). The next section explains the many services available to parents and the variety of ways these services are provided at the PSP centers. Services include fun family events; parenting classes; adult-only activities; skills-building classes; peer group discussions; mental health services; alternative forms of child care, including sick-child care and respite; parent involvement; and services for newcomer families. Subsequent sections cover the topics of: (1) minimum requirements for the parent services coordinator, child care, and food or refreshments; (2) the cost of services and ways to lessen the cost; and (3) the impact of PSP in terms of savings to the state of California, long-term effects, and PSP's advocacy of California's proposed Parent Services Bill: AB 2413. (HOD)

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From Child Care To Family Care

The Parent Services Handbook

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From Child Care To Family Care

The Parent Services Handbook

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Foreword

This handbook is intended to encourage child care centers to expand their support to the parents of the children enrolled in their programs. This support not only directly benefits individual parents, it positively affects their children—and can increase family involvement in center activities.

The handbook explains the Parent Services Project, describes the many services to parents and details the variety of ways they are provided at the PSP centers. For five years, through experimentation, PSP staff and parents learned what works and how to successfully serve different kinds of parent groups. We now are able to analyze costs, suggest practical means of offering services to parents and avoid implementation pitfalls, and document the impact PSP has had on the families—and on the child care centers.

This handbook reflects what we have learned in five years of transforming our child care centers into family care centers. It has been a challenging process that has strengthened the families and helped our agencies to mature. And it's a process that can work successfully in most any child care center, including yours.

'I'm not alone'

When I decided to go to my first PSP parent meeting, I went with the idea that it would be relaxing and nice to have dinner with other parents, says Carolyn Pavageau, a single parent who has a 5-year-old child in after-school care at a Marin Office of Education center and a 2-year-old at Sprouts. *But the meetings turned out to be much, much more: We discuss important things openly, I've developed friendships and I've learned I'm not alone in my problems. Meeting with others is like having a family away from home.*

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'PSP adds joy and zest'

Ethel Seiderman, director, Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center: *Parents generally have been led to believe that they need to do it all on their own. But that's virtually impossible, particularly for single parents. The variety of roles parents have is enormous. To perform them right, you need to do them in cooperation with other people. Not only that, working with other people in PSP adds joy and zest. These feelings have significance beyond the moment or particular activity and carry into the rest of your life.*

The Parent Services Project

Raising a family, never easy, now seems more difficult for more parents than ever before.

Many parents are raising their children alone, without the traditional assistance of extended families that long ago disappeared or never existed for the majority of young parents today.

The number of refugee and immigrant families is growing and often these parents don't speak English, compounding the already considerable economic and cultural challenges they face.

With unemployment high and wages falling behind the rising living costs, middle-class families also feel the pressures, which can create stress, resulting in child abuse, neglect or other mistreatment.

The social and economic trends of contemporary life have made child care a must for most young parents, now that both generally work outside the home. The child care center has become the place where parent(s) and child(ren) come together in the same nurturing environment. One or both parents may be seen regularly during any typical day as they drop off or pick up a child before and after work.

If child care centers offered parents more than drop-and-run contact, then the centers would be nurturing the parents as well as the children, and the entire family could grow stronger together. Child care centers would be transformed into family care centers, putting them in the vanguard for programming for families and children.

Not only the families would benefit. As parents get more involved, they would become supporters of the center, join organizing committees and take responsibility for some program direction and fund-raising.

The Primary Prevention Advisory Committee of Zellerbach Family Fund wanted to develop that potential when it initiated the Parent Services Project in 1980. The Committee had been formed earlier that year to advise Zellerbach staff and board about mental health and family and children's issues.

The members of the Committee are managers of public mental health and family services departments in Alameda, Marin, San Francisco and San Mateo counties, plus foundation program staff and some consultants of Zellerbach and The San Francisco Foundation. The Committee's monthly think-tank sessions are convened by Ed Nathan, Zellerbach executive director.

Committee members felt that if parents could gain

'If we're happy, the children are happier'

Anna has been in the United States for six years but her English is still halting. She only started taking English classes when she enrolled her daughter at Wu Yee in San Francisco two years ago. *In Taiwan I was an accountant, and I'd like to do that work again when I'm done with school and my English is good enough.* Anna is a single parent. She separated from her husband four years ago and says that PSP activities provide a chance for her to be with other adults. *All my family is in Taiwan, and I don't have many close friends, so PSP helps parents like me. We get to know and talk with other parents, share problems, exchange ideas and experiences. It also helps us get some rest and recreation and enjoy life more, and this is good for the children. If we're happy, the children are happier.*

confidence and competence—as people and as parents—the whole family would benefit. They knew that as parents feel stronger and more in charge of their own lives, their parenting improves and they are able to pass that strength and stability on to their children. Their children gain a better chance to become secure, productive, independent adults. Meanwhile, the families would have less need in the future for more costly social, medical and mental health services. Through PSP, parents would:

- Gain understanding and skills as parents
- Learn practical skills such as first aid and fluency in English
- Utilize alternative forms of child care such as respite and sick child care
- Receive mental health and social services if needed
- Develop leadership skills
- Enjoy family activities and social events at which they make friends and exchange parenting information.

The key to the parents' participation would be to make the services useful, convenient—by providing child care during PSP activities—and enjoyable.

PSP was to be a collaborative effort between the public and private sectors: The participating agencies were selected from among the state-funded child development centers and county mental health staff were to be available to PSP parents; Zellerbach and The San Francisco Foundation would cover additional staff costs and expanded program needs. These resources would give the PSP centers the freedom to experiment with service delivery and develop cost-efficient programs.

PSP would be a prevention program that would save public dollars by building social support systems for low-income families. These systems would be flexible, humane ways to encourage the inherent strengths of parents, provide them with relief from stress, and help them build support and friendship networks. In short, provide them with resources to gain confidence in their ability to manage their own lives.

People who are emotionally and physically healthy create more nurturing home environments for their children. This reduces the risk of family violence and dependence on drugs and alcohol. This in turn reduces the need for public services; in other words, saves tax money.

Keeping families intact would avoid expensive child protective services and foster placements. Helping parents find jobs would keep them economically independent and off unemployment.

To learn whether this concept could succeed in most any child care center—large or small, in city, suburb or ethnic community—the Primary Prevention Advisory

'Shoulders to lean on'

Our goal has always been to assist the parent as well as the child, says Adella Thomas, PCDCI project coordinator. *We want to be able to respond to their needs. We want to get them help before they're in a crisis. We ask parents what their specific needs are. They mention assertiveness, public speaking, they request help with child rearing and enhancing personal relationships. Also, dealing with stress—a topic they never seem to get enough of. By sharing with staff, they have some shoulders to lean on, and then they can move out of situations that may be detrimental to them and to their children.*

Committee selected four centers: two in Marin County and one each in San Francisco and Alameda counties. Combined, they served about 400 families, the majority of them low-income.

One center served primarily black single mothers, another was predominantly Hispanic with many non-English-speaking parents. Another served many Southeast Asian refugee families, and the population of the fourth was mainly low- to moderate-income whites. Within two years, additional centers joined PSP, nearly doubling the number of families served. These were the sorts of people and programs found throughout the state.

The PSP centers

The four original Parent Services Project center in 1980 were:

- Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center—79 families, mostly white, 57% single parents.
- Canal Child care Center—40 Families, 65% non-English-speaking, Southeast Asian and Hispanic. Fairfax and Canal are both in Marin County.
- Parent-Child Development Centers Inc., in Alameda County—144 families, mostly black, 69% single parents.
- Companeros del Barrio in San Francisco—120 families, 77% non-English-speaking, 74% in need of a job.

Two years later, these centers were joined by:

- Wu Yee Resource & Referral Center in San Francisco's Chinatown—78 families, 85% married, 78% don't speak English.
- Sprouts Infant and Toddler Center in Marin County—24 families, 50% single parents and 42% in need of a job.
- Iniece Bailey Infant and Toddler Center in Marin County—32 families, 60% black, 60% single parents.
- 7 Marin County Office of Education sites—169 families combined, 64% single parents.

'A feeling of ownership'

Having PSP saved my life emotionally, says Linda Pratt, who has two children, 3 and 6, and has been at Iniece Bailey Infant and Toddler Center in Marin for two years. *I'm married, but my husband's in prison. He stays involved with the kids through visits in a special program, but on a day-to-day level, it's like being a single parent.* Linda works full time at a Head Start program, participates in many PSP activities and is on the Iniece Bailey board. *I got drawn into the board because I'd had some experience in planning at Head Start, and also I felt guilty about leaving the kids and working full time. Getting involved helped me feel strong and confident about my situation. One way to get parents to use what's available is to get them involved in planning — if there's a feeling of ownership, parents will use the services.*

The Services

The services PSP provides comprise a complete program, scheduled frequently, well staffed, running the gamut from social events for the family to classes and workshops and alternative forms of child care. The range and regularity of the services creates a presence for PSP at the centers, and offers the parents who get involved enough support to make a positive difference in their lives.

But it is not necessary to provide a full program of parent services to be of benefit to your families. One service at a time can help, and a reshuffling of resources may be all that is required to get started.

PSP provides the following:

Family fun events

These are the most universally enjoyed of all the PSP activities, and their importance cannot be overstated. These activities provide crucial social support.

When parents can enjoy good times with their children, they feel they are better parents. Guilt is reduced and self-esteem is enhanced when they are able to provide movies, trips or special events for their children. The laughter and games of the family events relieve stress and promote greater physical and mental well-being.

Family events also give parents opportunities to interact with other parents, many of whom are isolated, far from their own families and too busy surviving work and child rearing to have much energy left for socializing. At every family activity at every center, groups of parents gather to discuss problems of child rearing. As one Marin County mother said fervently, "It's amazing how we all have the same problems."

Family fun activities lead to peer support networks. Wu Yee staff noticed that as parents got together for bus trips to go pick fruit or pumpkins, they became more relaxed with each other, made plans to have coffee together, and began to exchange suggestions about discipline.

Family fun activities can serve to entice parents into PSP. At potlucks and zoo trips the parents become acquainted and get to know staff. As they feel more comfortable, a level of trust begins to build.

Parenting classes

Parents of all backgrounds want to do the best job they can to raise their children. They are eager for information about stages of development, what to expect as their

'The services are invaluable'

I'm a single parent, and I've had a lot of financial and emotional problems, says Lynde Ricketts. She has a daughter, 6, and a son who recently had to leave Sprouts Infant and Toddler Center in Marin because he'd passed the 2-year-9-month age limit. *Things were really bad just a little while ago—my kids couldn't get along at all, and I felt I had to get away from my son. PSP respite helped us get away from each other for short times and it helped me sort things out. My son's living in Oakland now, but I'm trying to get him into another center here in Marin—I hope it will be one with PSP because the services are invaluable. I guess things are looking up now: I'm working as assistant cook at a Head Start program, I'm off welfare and it feels so good. Sprouts is an excellent school. I can't tell you how supportive the staff were.*

children get older and how to respond effectively.

As with the other activities, parenting classes must be designed with specific parent populations in mind. At Companeros, the language and cultural context is Spanish. "I learned at lot at the child development workshop," says parent Cecilia Suarez, "like what to do when your child puts you on the spot by asking questions and more questions. You should explain things as well as you can and not just ignore the child. My boy's very quiet now, but when he starts, I'll be ready and I'll be a better parent."

At Wu Yee, the parenting class was conducted by a Chinese-speaking Asian woman. While some of the problems of raising children are universal, the responses to the frustration may be culturally instilled. "Sometimes my daughter won't listen to me," says a Wu Yee parent. "In my culture, we hit a child that doesn't obey, but in the class we learned that sometimes talking, not hitting, would be better."

Adult-only activities

Parents need time away from their children, and vice versa. But that doesn't happen often in families in which the parents cannot afford additional child care or a baby sitter, or in certain cultures where parents are reluctant to entrust their kids to anyone outside the family.

But by hosting events for adults only, and providing child care to encourage attendance, PSP has been able to create settings that foster socializing and decrease the sense of isolation.

One of the most successful models is the Mothers' Club at Companeros del Barrio, a bi-monthly evening of cooking, talking and salsa dancing that attracts about 40 mainly Hispanic mothers to each event. For many of the mothers, it is their only social activity. A Companeros mother put it this way: "I can come and laugh and be silly. For an evening I feel different, feel at home."

One reason these mothers feel free to treat themselves to a night off is that their children are being cared for in another room of the center by some of the center teachers. Having the parents' confidence that their children are in good hands is a key to the success of the Mothers' Club and other adult-only activities.

When they work, adult-only activities can provide valuable encouragement for parents to take some time to nurture themselves. Canal Child Care Center in San Rafael accomplished it by holding workshops to increase their awareness of good health and nutrition. The trick seems to be to start lightly and realize that social activities can be forums for support building, networking and referrals and information exchange. County social worker

'The most special times'

Victoria Morales has eight children, the oldest 9, the youngest 9 months. At Companeros del Barrio in San Francisco for several years, she participates in Mothers' Club, goes to classes and workshops, uses respite and attends family events as often as she can. *The PSP staff really care about the community and they go out of their way to help us or find help for us. Sometimes when I'm just feeling down, I can call Igen* (Chan, parent coordinator) *and she makes me feel better. Once when I had an emergency, one of the staff took all my kids for the night. I think the most fun for me were the driving classes—if I had a car it would really help me get around because of all the children. The Mothers' Clubs, though, are really the most special times. They help me relax and have the kids taken care of and I can enjoy talking with other mothers.*

Rosemarie Moore gained the trust of Hispanic mothers at Companeros by joining them at Mothers' Club; now she is welcome in their homes.

Skills-building classes

Gaining practical skills increases parents' competence which, in turn, boosts their confidence and self-esteem. Through PSP, they learn to sew, they learn CPR techniques, driver education, nutrition, auto repair, personal money management and many other things that are useful day to day. The centers survey the parents for their preferences for class content, then contact community resources for someone to lead the classes. Child care is provided to encourage attendance.

Among the most important classes for centers serving newcomers is English as a second language (ESL). Janet Mars, parent coordinator for seven Marin County Office of Education PSP sites, had difficulty getting newcomer families to participate in PSP—until she decided to offer ESL classes with child care. Not only were the ESL classes well-attended, participation in other PSP activities increased as the parents gained fluency in English.

Peer group discussions and mental health services

Parents feel better about themselves and their situations when they know they're not alone, and they can learn about themselves from the guidance provided by professionals. PSP centers foster peer group discussions, and staff can bring in mental health professionals to lead workshops in reducing stress, disciplining children, sexuality, and other topics. These help parents gain perspective on their situations, insight into their behavior and ways to change, if they want.

These activities are often attended on the suggestion of a center staff member. Most of the centers, seeing that the parents have such a need to share problems with other parents, have tried some form of peer support group. Some have succeeded, others have failed to attract enough participants. The idea of such discussions, is not only frequently frightening, it also is alien to many cultures.

Parents at most of the centers, however, have been involved in peer discussions because the centers offer natural opportunities to encourage participation. Companeros did it with Mothers' Club and then was able to follow up with peer support groups in Spanish. Canal held some cooking classes that became sharing sessions, providing the Southeast Asian boat parents an opportunity to tell stories of their escape. Similar sharing takes place at monthly parents meetings at each Marin County Schools

'It's hard to draw men in'

I got involved with PSP because I felt guilty about not being with my son, says Charlie Zoerner, whose 6-year-old is at Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center in Marin. *I was a single father until two weeks ago when I remarried and working for the center kept me closer to my boy.* Charlie is on the center board, does fund-raising to help ensure that the center's many activities will continue and is active in its men's group. *We have a Fathers' Breakfast regularly where we cook and then eat breakfast with the kids for the first hour, then have child care so the men can talk. We have a good time, complaining and sharing concerns about kids, wives, bosses, government. Men are often hesitant to get involved with groups like this because it implies that you need some help, some companionship that you can't get somewhere else. Of course, that's true for a lot of us, but it's hard to draw men in.*

site. At one meeting, a mother said:

"The last meeting was really good. We started talking about birth, then marriage and divorce. It really relieved me to get out some stuff that's been there for years and years. I wasn't expecting it, and I felt apologetic, but then I thought I didn't have to apologize. It made me feel really good."

At Companeros a mental health worker from the County Department of Social Services has been working with the parents almost as if she is a member of the Companeros staff. And PCDCI regularly offers workshops in relationships, child rearing and stress reduction. Adella Thomas, project coordinator, explains: "We hold workshops on the areas of parents' concerns—'Fair Fighting,' 'Sexuality,' 'Single Parenting,' 'How to Develop Intimacy.' By joining a workshop, they don't have to personally tell anyone what's wrong. They can come and, as a part of a group, learn quietly on their own. They can hear something that can turn their life around. The workshop can help people put things into perspective; they realize they're not alone. Also, they can get specific information.

"In one workshop, a parent said she wanted to go back to school, but couldn't. Someone in the group asked her why not. At first she couldn't answer that, but the group kept her on the hot seat, until she confronted herself and decided she would go back to school. She did, and earned her degree, and she became active on PCDCI's board and a further benefit to the program. The group had shocked her into realizing she could do more, they made her face why not and the answer was in herself."

Alternative forms of child care

Two PSP centers provide sick-child care and all have respite on a regular basis.

Fairfax-San Anselmo and Iniece Bailey provide sick-child care, though Fairfax was providing care for moderately ill children years before PSP. It's not a service all centers can offer, as it requires a room and furnishings separate from the well chidren, and many centers lack the space.

To offer sick-child care regularly, you must draw from a large enough population of children to make it economically feasible. Fairfax finds that on most days, about 5% of its 80 enrollment is moderately ill—with maybe a runny runny nose and temperature of 102° or less, sick enough to need rest and attention throughout the day, but not so sick they're incapacitated or seriously contagious. Usually, four to six kids use Fairfax's Get Well Room each workday, about the right number for one child care worker to handle.

'We have a voice in what happens'

I'm a single, low-income parent, on welfare, and I'm taking 9 units in school trying to get my BA—trying to improve my life and earning capacity, says Paula Stepp. Her 6-year-old daughter goes after school to the Hamilton Children's Center, which is one of the Marin County Office of Education Child Development Centers. *I've had incredible crises. I had to move three times in six months. When I first came to this center, I didn't know about PSP services, but they're a lifesaver. My daughter only seems to be sick during mid-terms or finals. And I use respite sometimes, even just to do homework. Leisure time is a gift that benefits all of us.* The PSP parenting classes, offered over a period of three months every other Thursday night, plus follow-up sessions, are helping Stepp enormously, she says. *I'm learning to be more enlightened about how to raise my kid. The classes help me open up—they're a doorway, a beginning. Poor people like me are used to being powerless, but we're learning we have a voice in what happens in our lives.*

Iniece Bailey has fewer than 35 children enrolled, so it accepts moderately ill children from other centers. Centralizing a service for several small centers works when they all are nearby.

But the three-stage route taken by Fairfax toward a sick-child care program, shows how a single center can offer the service on an as-needed basis, which is also the case with Iniece Bailey.

In 1973, a Fairfax center teacher whose home was licensed for day care occasionally brought small groups of children, especially those feeling under the weather, to her house for a break in the routine to bake cookies or play more quietly than was possible at the center. "At the end of the year," says Fairfax Director Ethel Seiderman, "there was no question that the issue of what to do with slightly sick kids was something we had to address."

The opportunity for stabilizing the staff of the sick-child care service came in 1974 with a CETA contract for a licensed family day care provider who lived near the center. The off-site provision of this service eventually complicated matters sufficiently that bringing sick-child care to the center was a necessary third stage of development of the service.

Off-site, Ethel says, things just didn't go as smoothly. "The day care worker/teacher had to wait at home to see if there were sick kids and then come to the center to work if there weren't. If a child got sick in the middle of the day we had to arrange transportation to the family day care home. It was awkward but it was all that was available to us because we had no space. Though not ideal, it let us respond to the need and introduce the sick-child care concept."

Regarding respite

All of the centers have scheduled Saturday or evening respite care so the parents can have time to themselves. Some centers offer respite monthly, some weekly, others occasionally.

Respite is a popular and beneficial service; it relieves pent-up pressures on the parents, and the children usually look forward to it too. PCDCI, for instance turns respite into a fun time for the kids, such as by taking them to the zoo, or to get a pizza or ice skating while the parents shop, visit friends or do something else.

Providing respite during family emergencies is another invaluable PSP service. Said a PCDCI parent: "When I was hospitalized for five days, PSP arranged full-time respite care for my two children. Without it, the children would have been temporarily placed in foster homes. I'm a single parent, and PSP helped keep my family together."

'Sick-child care saved our jobs'

Michele Barni has 18-month-old twins who've been at Iniece Bailey Infant and Toddler Center in Marin since they were 3 months old. She works full time as a legal assistant and her husband is a teacher. *I know we're a little better off than many parents at this center, but we still have financial problems and some needs that PSP's helped with. Last year, both my husband and I were sick, and then the kids got sick. Sick child care literally saved our jobs. We've used respite too, just to have some free time together to relax and do errands without two toddlers. PSP has been an extra added bonus for us.*

Parent involvement

Getting parents involved in these activities requires patience and persistence, but the payoff to the center as well as the person can make it worthwhile. All of the PSP centers have organized a group of their parents into a committee that decides which parent activities to sponsor and how much to allocate for them. This puts the responsibility for the success of the parent activities on the shoulders of the parents rather than only center staff. The advisory body at Fairfax-San Anselmo is called Parents in Action. Mary Kielich, a parent on that committee, has some advice and anecdotes about parent participation:

"Being part of Parents in Action brought out some leadership qualities I didn't know I had. It's very satisfying. But you shouldn't pressure parents to get involved, though you've got to make sure to get the word out about activities. It is hard to get information to parents about services without it seeming like charity, but we try.

"The personal approach, with phone trees, sometimes works. For example, we were having a family dinner to celebrate Thanksgiving and we contacted one of our Vietnamese families, explained what the holiday is and invited them to join us. They came and enjoyed it—and I think they'll come to other events.

"To get parents to come to adults-only activities, like evening workshops, child care is essential. Without it, participation would be zero, I think."

Serving newcomer families

Lisa Lee, director of Wu Yee in San Francisco's Chinatown, has some practical advice for centers that serve large immigrant populations. Of Wu Yee's 78 families, 78% speak only Chinese.

- Taking advantage of public transportation for outings cuts costs, encourages independence and, most important, is a great teaching tool.
- Workshops should concentrate on daily living skills. Have lots of potlucks and bring in speakers like public health nurses or dentists or mental health consultants who can donate their time. With immigrants, food is close to their hearts. Having a dinner where parents can cook and socialize together brings them together in a really supportive way.
- Just having PSP pay for a staff member to be available to *talk* to parents, answer their questions, listen to their problems about daily struggles and how hard their life is, calm their fears, is very unique. Staff at other child care centers usually can't take the time to do that, and it's essential for immigrants.

'Parents in action'

Linda Allen, parent coordinator, Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center:
Some parents don't come to any of the PSP activities, and they're not necessarily ones who couldn't benefit from them. Then there are parents who seem to come to everything. We have an active core of 9 or 10 parents who are part of Parents in Action—their goal is to get parents out to use the services. There's a phone tree—each parent calls another 9 or 10 parents. We have a newsletter that comes out bi-monthly that we mail to all parents, and we have a bulletin board—one parent is putting a spotlight on it so it will really show up—that has announcements of activities, a calendar for the month and resource information. Also, I've started mailing postcards out to announce special events. The best-attended lately have been holiday dinners, like the Christmas dinner where we also made ornaments. I've also painted signs about activities and put them up in front of the building and in the halls. The parents like the way they look and they do call attention to activities. Child development workshops, like the family events, are always well-attended.

- Immigrant populations change and centers have to be alert to changing needs. Wu Yee still has many large Chinese families, usually extended families, with many living in small spaces. But Wu Yee is seeing a big jump in the number of single parents. They may need different kinds of services than those the center currently provides.

Sample monthly activities

The PSP centers try to offer a variety of services to their parents each month, giving them a range of alternatives to choose from. The types of services change with the needs of the parents, the time of year and the availability of resources. Following is a sampling of services provided at two PSP centers during March and May 1985.

At the Marin County schools centers during May 1985, PSP activities included:

- Parent potlucks at five of the six centers for a total of 30 parents. Child care for 43 children.
- Twenty parents went to see "42nd Street" in San Francisco. Child care for 15 children.
- One planning meeting attended by three parents. Child care for 5 children.
- One day of respite at each of the six centers for a total of 60 parents. Child care for 84 children.

In March 1985, Canal Child Care Center offered:

- Ten ESL workshops with an average attendance of 5 parents at each session. Child care for an average of 4 children per session.
- Family movie night for 10 parents and 19 children.
- Day-long retreat for 13 parents at Dominican College. Child care for 10 children.
- One planning meeting attended by 8 parents. Child care for 5 children.

'Better ways to teach my children'

I'd like to have more child development classes — I want to learn better ways to teach my children, says Sue. *For example, in one class we learned not to ignore children when they ask to be told stories, because they're curious and that's one way to teach them.* Sue has two children, 3 and 6. She's been a Wu Yee parent for one year, is a member of the parent committee that helps plan PSP activities and attends as many events and workshops as she can. *Sandwich-making class was a lot of fun. We learned to make ham and tuna sandwiches so the children can take their lunches to school. But the children,* she explains, laughing, *only like the ham, and only with lettuce and mayonnaise. In the nutrition class we learned the value of raw vegetables — that's different for us, because the Chinese almost always cook vegetables.*

The Minimum Requirements

Parent services can cost a little or a lot. But, unlike many businesses or products, putting more money into parent services doesn't necessarily make them better. Quality is in the level of participation.

PSP's funding has been sufficient to experiment with styles of delivery and, through trial and error, staff have been able to determine the minimum requirements for an effective program and develop guidelines to achieve cost-efficiency:

Parent services coordinator

This needn't be a full-time position, but somebody must coordinate the activities, make sure everything runs smoothly, and act as a sounding board and source of information for the parents. Canal's, Sprouts' and PCDCI's coordinators work half-time; the other programs have full-time coordinators.

Child care for all parent activities

Most parents can't afford a baby sitter to attend events at the center, and if they could, few would be willing to do so regularly. These services should be convenient for parents to receive, and cost them as little as possible. For five parents, each with one child, to attend a two-hour class at the center might cost them collectively $30 to $45 for baby sitters at $2-$3 per hour including travel time. Whereas, it would cost only $8 to $13 for a child care worker at the center. PSP centers pay their child care workers $4 to $6.60 per hour, and they staff this off-hours service at a 5-to-1 ratio of children to child care worker. For many activities for parents, child care is the center's major expense.

Food, or at least refreshments, at all parent activities

This does more than feed the hungry. The preparation, presentation and tastiness of the food adds to the ambience and encourages conversation as it engenders good feelings within the group. Thus the popularity of potlucks. But an hourlong parenting class may call for only coffee and pastry, while a full meal is the focus for the merriment at Companeros' Mothers' Club.

The bi-monthly evening PSP Steering Committee

'Certainly helped me'

Felicia Demann has a daughter, 2, who's been at Sprouts Infant and Toddler Center in Marin since she was 4 months old, and an 8-year-old who was at Canal Child Care Center when the PSP program first started there. *I'm on the Sprouts advisory board and I help plan PSP activities. The services have certainly helped me—I've used sick child care several times, and it's hard to say what would have happened if it wasn't available. I work full time as a secretary for Del Monte and I surely would have had to stay home, which they wouldn't have appreciated.*

meetings, which often are well-attended by parents of the host site, have featured some memorable meals, including delicious ethnic dishes. Examples have been Nicaraguan tamales, Vietnamese chicken, Chinese roast duck, creamy vegetable quiche and tangy barbecue beef. Fairfax-San Anselmo, oldest of the PSP centers, hosted annual holiday feasts for its families years before PSP, but that tradition at Thanksgiving and Christmas has started at some centers with the addition of PSP.

Food need not be expensive. Food for Fairfax's monthly Fathers' Breakfast costs only about $25. To feed a dozen fathers and that many kids as well as serve as the drawing card for such an unusual gathering makes it seem a pittance, although in actuality resources at the center would be reshuffled if necessary to ensure continuing funding for the breakfasts. Fairfax-San Anselmo is the only PSP center that has been able to maintain an on-going program for fathers.

Monthly food budgets for PSP activities range from $20 at Iniece Bailey to $30 per center at the Marin County school sites.

Among PSP's most efficient, effective—and enjoyable—uses of food funds is for the annual picnic that brings together families from all the PSP centers for a multicultural experience. For $600, PSP feeds 500 parents and children hamburgers, hot dogs, soda pop plus interesting ethnic dishes from each center that help flavor the event with the feel of a cultural sharing that is rare, especially for so large a gathering.

Food can play a role in other ways. Fairfax parents have cultivated a community garden from which they harvest vegetables—for themselves and for PSP activities. Also at Fairfax, parents formed a food co-op through which families can purchase produce for about one-third less than in grocery stores.

'I love the cooking classes'

I love movie nights, but most of all I love the cooking classes, says Pilar Zalderama. Her 4-year-old nephew, who lives with her, attends Canal Child Care Center in Marin. *Each time we have a different parent cooking. I've done it twice—once I made flan and the other time a Peruvian meat dish. There's always a lot of people who come, about 15, and we have a very good time, cooking and talking and eating foods from all over the world. Now we've started celebrating birthdays at the cooking classes and it's wonderful. I hope these classes continue—there's lots of good feelings and food brings people together.*

Affordable Services: Analysis of Costs

Some centers may be able to afford a full program of parent services with a coordinator and frequent activities; if not, a limited offering is a good way to get started and can be effective.

Many services for parents can be offered one at a time for relatively little cost per parent. For example, Fairfax-San Anselmo, Wu Yee and Companeros pay $1, $2 and $3, respectively, per participating parent to provide classes and workshops. And the cost of family activities at all the centers averages $5 per family, which includes food, transportation and child care if needed.

Two factors significantly affect the cost of parent services: the necessary cash outlay and the number of participants. The more parents attending an activity, the less it costs to serve each one.

With good participation, even respite can be provided at a reasonable cost for an all-day activity. The Marin County schools centers, for instance, during 1985 hosted a respite day about every two weeks that drew, on average, 10 parents and 14 children at a cost of $10 per participant, including child care, which is the major expense of respite.

Mental health services can be extremely inexpensive relative to the costs of other private and public providers. PCDCI averages 10 parents at its mental health workshops and, by keeping costs low, spends an average of $4 per participant for these activities, which can be so meaningful to parents. And, if you contact your local Department of Social Services, you may be able to establish a working relationship with a county social worker, as Companeros has done so successfully, to whom you can refer your families when necessary, with services provided at no cost.

Family activities, from potlucks to picnics, are popular at the PSP centers, and Companeros has developed a cost-efficient approach. It sponsors few family activities, but selects them appropriately so that the majority of families join in and attendance averages 120-150 per event. Family activities include an annual excursion to Aguas Calientes, which necessitates chartering buses for the group. But with such a crowd, the per-unit cost of service is $3 to $4, quite reasonable for so special an activity.

Also significantly affecting cost-efficiency is the expense involved; less cash outlay results in lower per-unit costs. The $1-a-person food costs for the Fairfax men's breakfasts is one example. The $1-a-person cost of hosting monthly

'A visible role model'

Mary Davis has three children at Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center, a 1-year-old and 6½-year-old twins. She works full time as a nurse and her husband is in real estate. *The center and its activities have been my life support. I use respite all the time — the evening respites are the best, because they let me and my husband just go out alone. And I use sick child care whenever I have to. I know some parents don't use sick child care. Maybe they think their kids will get sicker with all those sick kids around, but that's not really the case. If other parents see me in my nurse's uniform putting my kids in sick child care, I'll be a visible role model. They might think, 'Hey, she's a nurse, so it must be OK.' I try to promote PSP services whenever I can.*

planning meetings for Canal Child Care Center's PSP parents committee is another.

Sick-child care can be expensive if available daily, but the way that Iniece Bailey does it, it's affordable and could cost less with greater participation. Iniece Bailey provided sick-child care on 28 occasions during the first half of 1985 at a cost of $15 each time. Only one child had been cared for on each occasion; had five children been cared for, the per-unit cost would have dropped to $3.

There are many ways to lessen the cost of the services, but the first step is to decide parent services are important and start reallocating resources to sponsor these activities. Once parent services become a priority, there are ways to make them affordable.

Negotiating with other providers is one way. Companeros' relationship with the San Francisco Department of Social Services has resulted in many hours of free, professional assistance for parents. Local YMCAs sponsor free legal assistance clinics that you could get for your parents. Safeway donates all the sodas for the annual PSP picnic because the Picnic Committee asked.

Donations from parents is another way to spread the costs. If your center decides to go on a weekend camping trip that costs $25 per family, a donation from the parents of half the cost makes the activity affordable.

For respite, if parents made a donation of 50 cents per hour, a $4 donation from each of 10 parents could pay all child care costs for an 8-hour respite.

PSP parents have been willing to do a lot of fund-raising to help pay for the PSP activities. Companeros parents raise $5,000 or more every year through bake sales, food booths at street fairs and other fund-raisers. Iniece Bailey parents pitched in and voluntarily refurbished the center. Canal parents have kept a regular flow of funds coming in through various benefit events.

The question is not *whether* a center can provide parent services, but *when* will it prioritize such services and reshuffle its resources to embark on a program.

'I feel more in control'

Elvernetta Elebee has a child at PCDCI. The PSP workshops have been invaluable to her. *I attend lots of classes, and they've all been very good. We recently had a Mace class, taught by a police officer. I learned how I've been taking my safety for granted. Now I have a license to carry Mace, and while I'm more paranoid when I'm out, especially at night, I also feel more in control. That class was very well-attended, about 15 or 20 people, and the room was full. We had to schedule another session.*

Measuring the Impact

Savings to the state

It costs to regularly offer parents respite from the inexorable routine of raising kids, to give them a chance to socialize with other adults and families, or the opportunity to take an exercise class or a workshop in child development or nutrition. It costs, but it's cost-efficient.

It costs more to provide crisis services to families.

A full program of preventive services to parents can save $240 a year in public funds for every family served. That is the finding of a study of PSP by W. Paul Harder, director, Center for Human Services at the San Francisco-based research organization, The URSA Institute.

Harder analyzed the costs of providing mental health and social services to high-risk families such as those served by PSP. By preventing emotional stress, illness, substance abuse, child and spouse abuse and other costly family problems, PSP could save the state an estimated $630, which is $240 more than the approximately $390 per family per year it costs our model PSP program to offer a full program of services.

And these are the short-term savings on the costs likely to occur during one year.

"There are longer-term savings which can only be guessed at," the study says. "These include the savings associated with keeping a family intact rather than allowing it to shatter under the pressures of everyday life. The costs of long-term family dissolution, welfare dependency, substance abuse and other criminal activity are astronomical. Even without considering these costs, and the savings the state is likely to realize over time, the short-term benefits of PSP are clear. Within a year of operation, PSP can generate significant cost savings. For every family served, over $400 in crisis intervention, social service, mental health treatment and health care costs can be saved."

The long-term effects of PSP

To measure the impact of PSP on the families served, a three-year evaluation is under way under the direction of Alan Stein, coordinator, Evaluation and Management Information Systems, Alameda County Mental Health Services. Stein and his research team are interviewing PSP center parents, gathering evaluation of every PSP activity at every center, and will compare the findings with

'PSP can supply a fullness to life'

PSP gives parents the chance to do exciting and heartwarming things with their families that they ordinarily wouldn't have either the finances or the freedom of time to do, says Canal Child Care Center Director Barbara Zeavin. *There's so little of that to be had by parents of low income. PSP can supply a fullness to an area of life that for many of our parents simply isn't there.*

results from a control group to learn whether the impact of parent services over time is measurable.

How long does it take to perceive change? Is the change temporary or lasting? Which services are most effective? These are some of the questions the Stein evaluation hopes to answer at the end of 1987 when the research is complete.

It is an ambitious study, sufficiently broad, methodologically sound, consistently administered over a long enough period of time that it could prove to be a major contribution to the literature of human services evaluations.

The Parent Services Bill: AB 2413

Believing in the preventive nature of a full program of services to parents, PSP advocates passage of AB 2413, a bill authored by Assemblyman William Filante, R-Greenbrae.

A similar version of AB 2413 was approved by the Legislature in 1984 but was vetoed by Gov. George Deukmejian as too costly and duplicative.

Reintroduced in 1985 by Filante as AB 2413, the Parent Services Bill is scheduled to go to the Legislature in March 1986 and, hopefully, pass through both houses and be signed by the governor in September 1986.

If AB 2413 becomes law, $486,000 will become available to state-funded child development centers to institute programs of parent services, and $60,000 will be allocated to evaluate these programs. The centers that apply for the funds will be required to come up with a 10% match. The approximately half-million dollars involved is not a lot of money for the more than 600 state-funded child development centers, but it's a good start.

We hope you will join our effort on behalf of parent services delivered at child care centers.

The numbers from the long-term evaluation may be two years away, but after five years of this programming at our centers we are convinced that services to parents strengthen the entire family. PSP has broadened our perceptions of our roles as child care providers and increased parent involvement at our centers. And, we believe the benefits we are experiencing at our centers reflect the benefits of PSP on the 700 families we serve.

'Free time is a real luxury'

Faye Piper uses respite every time it's offered at Novato Children's Center, one of the Marin County Office of Education Child Development Centers. She has two boys, 4 and 9, and has been a center parent for three years. *I'm a single parent and I get no support from the boys' father, so free time is a real luxury. On respite days, maybe I'll just clean the house or go out for a while. I find that one day a month saves me mentally — I look forward to it all the time and the kids love it.*

Parent Services, Step by Step

Family fun events

These are activities that include the entire family; some may take place at the center.

Examples: Trip to the zoo, movie night, arts and crafts night, camping trip, attending a sports event.

Adult-only activities

These activities give parents a chance to socialize with other center parents without their children present. Whether this activity takes place at the center or elsewhere, child care is provided.

Examples: Mothers' Club, Fathers' Breakfast, trip to a pizza parlor, night on the town and other entertainment.

Alternative child care

These services can be of utmost importance to parents. Respite can relieve stress and burnout, sick-child care can save a parent's job if they otherwise would have to miss work when their child gets ill.

Respite can be offered during the day or at night, regularly or occasionally.

Sick-child care requires a space separate from the well children. This service should be provided only to moderately ill children. It works most cost-efficiently in centers with 80 or more families, or as a service for several smaller centers in cooperation.

Skills-building classes

These activities give parents skills in practical matters and, as the parents gain competence, they build self-esteem. Parents can decide which topics to cover; the classes can be provided on a one-time basis or as a series.

Examples: ESL classes for newcomers to become fluent in English, sewing, driver education, CPR, legal matters, aerobics, nutrition, household budgeting, auto repair.

Parenting classes and mental health workshops

These services, which can be offered one time or as a series, can increase parents' understanding of themselves and their relationships with their children and others. PSP has been fortunate in having a resource at Fairfax-San

'Getting into the mainstream'

Lisa Lee, director, Wu Yee Resource and Referral:

Our parents' greatest needs when they first come here are related to language. They may have come here and started working immediately, and what with working and taking care of kids they've had no time for anything else, not English classes or any socializing. Many start English classes as soon as their kids are enrolled. Most haven't been out of Chinatown and are afraid to go anywhere else in the city because they can't read street signs. PSP helps us take them on outings around the city, show them places where they can take their kids, like to Golden Gate Park, so they don't feel so hemmed in. And we try to take them on public transportation, not special buses, so that when they're ready to try it on their own, they can. It seems to work—parents have gone on these outings and not long after, a few will get together and try it on their own. I'm sure it gives them a big boost of confidence to be able to do that. Just the support we can give—through workshops and by providing info on resources, in person and on written, bilingual materials—probably fills one of their greatest needs: getting into the mainstream.

Anselmo Children's Center—Stan Seiderman, the social worker/associate director there—who has expertise in this area and has presented a range of parenting topics at many of the PSP centers.

Parenting class topics include: limit setting and disciplining your child, toilet training and the stages of child development.

The mental health workshops also provide insight and information that can change parents' perceptions about themselves and, as a result, alter their behavior.

Mental health workshop topics include: stress reduction, sexuality, intimacy, avoiding burnout and others.

The process

The process for providing services to parents is similar for each type. You follow the same steps whether hosting a family fun event or providing respite. To illustrate, here's what to do to sponsor a family outing to a sporting event.

1. The parents decide which event to attend and when. Participation increases when the activity is planned at their request.
2. Contact the promoter of the sporting event to negotiate for a group rate. Tickets to baseball and basketball games often can be obtained at half-price as can theatrical events.
3. Get the particulars to the parents through phone trees, bulletin board announcements, newsletter story, word of mouth, etc.
4. When you know how many families want to attend, arrange for adequate transportation.
5. Go, and have fun.

Other events may require child care and food. If so, make the appropriate arrangements so that everything goes smoothly.

'The PSP model'

The PSP model is replicable from California to New York, says Ethel Seiderman, director of Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center. *Parents everywhere want to do a good job raising their kids, and PSP simply says that to do a good job for your kid you need to get resources for yourself. We've found that to give those resources to parents may simply mean reshuffling your center's resources. First look at what your families' needs are, what would be useful to them. Then figure out how to realistically meet those needs, using what you have and what you can readily obtain. The main question to answer is: Do you want programs that make a difference in the children's and parents' lives, or do you want to take the cheap way out using shortcuts that aren't effective? And I don't mean just in terms of money.*

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